

EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND CONTEXTUAL  
CONTRIBUTIONS  
OF *est*  
TO  
GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY.

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## ABSTRACT

"Epistemological and Contextual Contributions of est to General Systems Theory"

In recent communications with members of the scientific community, I have become increasingly aware of parallels and convergences between what might be called the "theory of est" (its ontology, its epistemology, its psychology) and developments in cybernetics (Pask, von Foerster, Varela, et. al.), ecology (Bateson et. al.), and general systems theory (Bertalanffy, et. al.)

The purpose of this paper is to point out some of these parallels and convergences, and to state as clearly and as concisely as possible how these may be said to be epistemological and contextual contributions.

The paper will do so under the following general headings:

1. Self as context
2. The notion of responsibility
3. Cognitive homeostasis
4. Abstraction
5. Systems of knowing: the relation of abstraction, experience and concept

The paper presents the view that experiences of self as content systems are characterized by a repetitiveness (redundancy) which mechanize the experience of life and obscure the experience of "aliveness," and that experiences of self as generating context make it possible for selves to experience health, happiness, love and complete self-expression. Self as context allows the self to be complete, whole, alive. With self as context, life is a process of the expression of the experience of completion rather than a seeking to become complete. Similarly, experiences of relationship premised on self as content are contrasted with experiences of relation based on self as context.

The epistemological basis of these views are delineated.

As the founder of est, I recognize and welcome the opportunity to communicate about est and to interact with those members of the scientific community who have expressed an interest in knowing about est. And I recognize est's responsibility to communicate with the institutions of Society which have in common with est the purpose of serving people and the human community.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent communications with members of the scientific community,<sup>2,7,17,21,22</sup> I have become increasingly aware of parallels and convergences between what might be called the "theory" of est and developments in cybernetics, ecology, and general systems theory. So the purpose of this paper is to point out some of these parallels and convergences, and to state as clearly and as concisely as I can how these may be said to be contextual and epistemological contributions of est to general systems theory.

I have developed some skill in saying some of the things I want to say to people, so that they seem to get some value out of the experience of listening to what I say. And I must admit that it is not always the case that that experience makes it possible for them to say something about what I've said in the same context in which I said it. Now some people are just difficult to discuss these things with, and some of these things are just very difficult to discuss. And when you put the two together, it becomes very difficult to talk about these things at all.

So I'd like to see if I can overcome some of these difficulties today, in that I do have something I'd like to say, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to say it here. I'm especially pleased to have the chance to learn to say it to

people who have disciplines which can get a firmer grasp or insight into what I'm saying, so that I can see whether what I'm saying has any validity beyond the context in which I say it. I'm fairly clear that the context in which I usually say what I say produces some value for some people.

Now what I'd like to do is see if it's possible to say these things in the context of general systems theory, in such a way that the context called general systems theory can interact with these ideas and produce a greater value. And, to determine whether what I say has any value in the context called general systems theory, we could look at how general systems theory determines that things have value, and I don't know that general systems theory can determine all of the things that might be of value because I'm not certain that it is able to evaluate all the things that might be valuable to itself at this point in its development. In fact, I'm fairly clear that there are some things that might be of value of which it is possibly unaware at this point in its development.

So one of the things I'd like to do today is see whether it's possible to come up with a paradigm acceptable to that system called general systems theory to see whether it might be valuable to that system and to the people who use that system as a way of understanding things.

In other words, I want to begin a dialogue here between what we could call the epistemology of est and the epistemology of general systems theory, and to see if I can teach myself something about the relationship of those two epistemologies. And, to anticipate myself a little, I want to say that I find what I believe is sometimes called the interface of these two ways of knowing to be an exciting and fruitful adventure. So I'd like to share some of that excitement with you too.

For me, that adventure happens when I'm looking clearly at the roots or as I call them the sources of those moments of creation when a Newton or an Einstein or a Bertalanffy create--literally create--a whole new way of understanding things. Now, usually, people think that moments of creation of that sort are exceedingly rare in human history, and in a sense they are. At least, our records of leaps of this sort don't indicate that they're everyday occurrences. And yet, what I want to talk about is the possibility that leaps of this sort are not necessarily rare or unusual. In fact, in my view, what's rare and unusual is that such moments are regarded as necessarily rare and unusual. You see, I think all of us have the opportunity to have experiences of this sort, so the problem for me is not in understanding why they're so rare as in confronting the way of understanding which holds they must be rare because they're unusual. In my view, they not only

do not have to be unusual, they're not unusual and they don't have to be. Now that's not to say that tomorrow morning we're all going to wake up with the theory after general relativity or quantum mechanics, or the ultimate theorem of higher mathematics. Those would simply be contents in the context I want to talk about. I want to be very clear about this. What I want to talk about is the context in which breakthrough experiences of the sort which Einstein and others have had occur--not the theories which emerged from their experiences of that context.

## II. CONCEPTS AND EXPERIENCES

Now, to begin to talk about that context, I want to invite you to take a small leap, of a relatively familiar sort, by asking you to recall that there may be things in heaven or earth which are not dreamt of in our current epistemologies. I want to invite you to actively entertain the possibility that there might be some information around (and for the moment allow me to use the word information loosely) which information alters the way in which you know information. So the information I'm now going to talk about is epistemological--it's information about the way we know information. So that the content of the information itself is of no value--and what may be of value is we might hold or have the information in a way other than the way we usually hold information.

Ordinarily, we hold information in a storage system. For the most part, we don't have any information about anything that

can't be stored. So now let's look at the possibility that there is information which can't be stored, which, therefore, cannot be known by a system which notes things by storing them. If it's possible that there is information which cannot be stored, you cannot know that information with a storage mechanism. It wouldn't make any difference what your access system or retrieval system was--it wouldn't make any difference how sophisticated it was. If the particular kind of information you are attempting to gain access to cannot be stored, that kind of information which does not have the capacity to be stored cannot be available to you if you're attempting to get it from a system which uses storage to know things. In fact, if you're attempting to know something which cannot be known by a storage system, you're literally wasting your time attempting to know it with a storage system.

So let's look at storage systems. Essentially, storage is one of the three modes of existence of the universe. It is one of the three ways the universe is. In human terms, this system is usually called memory, and I include in it concepts and organized systems of concepts, or what I call beliefs. For example, what you and I call pain and suffering is in fact conceptual. So you can see that conceptual things are very real. It can be demonstrated fairly clearly that a chalk board is a concept--that is, our experience of the board is a concept--or, more accurately what we call our experience of the board is actually a concept.

I'm saying that things exist first as a process--or experience--and that when we find a successful process or experience, it results in a concept or memory. And by successful I simply mean it allows us to go on--in other words, to survive the process in which it occurred.

The problem is now that I've got a conceptual record of that process/experience, I tend to regard (or code) the next process/experience as essentially similar to the first one. I build up some redundancy. I gain predictability. I order my world by having the second experience resemble the first <sup>6,23</sup> or so I think at the time.

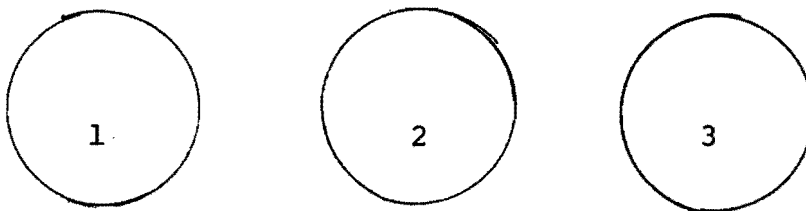
Now obviously, setting up feedback in this way has its advantages for any system's survival, and obviously, we say it has disadvantages. And for the most part, even when we're using concepts to define experiences which result in concepts which further define experiences, we think we're doing fine and avoiding the disadvantages because after all, we did survive, and after all, this experience does resemble that other one for the most part, doesn't it?

You see, just about everything we know about we found out by a combination of those two domains--the domains I'm calling experience and concept.

Now the problem with those domains is that they don't have any source. They don't come from anywhere. They chase each other around in a circle. As a matter of fact, as good systems scientists, when we study something, we observe a process, then build a concept that explains the process, which we then test against the process to see if the concept we built is in fact valid. This seems fairly circular to me. Science observes a process, builds a conceptual theory, goes back to the process to validate the theory, then the theory is used to look at other processes, and actually determines not only what to look for, but how to look at other processes, which tend to reinforce the theory, and what we wind up with is most western thought. Or, to use systems language, we tend to define such systems as "open" especially when they're closed. This is sometimes called "cognitive homeostasis,"<sup>22</sup> or the steady state of theory, if you'll permit the pun.

### III. ABSTRACTIONS

Now I want to share with you my experience of a third domain and again ask your indulgence if I use the word domain somewhat loosely for the present. If we were to draw three circles next to one another, and number them 1, 2, 3,



the first circle, number 1, would stand for a domain I call abstraction. I want to distinguish abstraction very sharply from the domain I call experience (circle 2) just as I've

distinguished experience from concept (circle 3). Abstraction is not experience and experience is not concept. And I want to point out a characteristic of the diagrams that helps to clarify using it as a springboard to convey what I want to say. And that characteristic is what we call the "direction" of time. What's sometimes called time's arrow which goes from experience to concept, or as we say, from present to past, and then around again from experience to concept.

Experience, which happens now-now-now-now-now-now is captured or stored as concept. In other words, we could say that storage equals form.

Abstraction, however, has no form. It doesn't happen in time and it doesn't happen any place. It is essentially dimensionless, so symbolizing it as a third circle is a heuristic device, because technically, abstraction isn't a domain. It's a source of domains, and technically, it has no dimensionality because it's the source or context of dimensionality.

To gain some clarity in this matter of defining abstraction, we could substitute the term "generating principle" and note that everything in the universe that exists comes from some generating principle.

I like to remember that when Heisenberg wrote about Plato's way of generating a world, he described how Plato had inspired him to understand atomic motion (without Plato's writing explicitly about atomic motion).<sup>12</sup>

Heisenberg saw that Plato had done an incredible thing in saying the basic structure of the world was an idea called a triangle--that Plato's generating principles of the world were abstractions he called triangles. What fascinated Heisenberg was precisely the idea that things were not the ultimate "building blocks" of the world. Heisenberg saw that as a different kind of explanation, which had enormous value for him, even though it created formidable problems for him in the domain of explanation.

Now I've got a formidable problem in this next part, because I have to say that abstractions can't be understood as concepts or experiences. In fact, abstractions serve as the context for experiences and concepts, and in my view, are actually the source of experiences, just as experiences are the source of concepts. And, given the way we usually understand things, something which can't be experienced or conceptualized can't be understood at all. Concepts explain. They do not generate. And abstractions generate--they don't explain.

And abstractions, to make matters temporarily worse, are not only without time or place, they are without content or form. They simply aren't things. They are the source of things. The realm of abstraction isn't a dimension--it's the context of dimensionality. It is what generates dimensions. And to be completely accurate, it isn't even a context. It's the context of all contexts, to stretch that term a bit.

Now I understand Russell solved this whole problem by inventing the theory of logical types, and I really don't like to be in conflict with Russell, given his stature, but I do find myself in conflict with Russell, because I see his theory as an attempt to approach this matter of abstraction by coming from concepts, not to them. So what we have in his theory is a conceptual handling of abstraction, not an abstract handling of concepts. In short, I think he closed that system even though he thought he left it open.

Now the question arises, if abstractions aren't anywhere in time or place, and don't have any content or form, just what or where are they?

The answer to that is, abstraction is a quality of self. Having said that, it becomes necessary for me to say what self is and what it is not, and what the abstract quality of self is and what it is not. And the first thing I want to say self is not, is self is not personality, or character, or mind, or your history, or the network of your social interactions. Self is the source of your experience of those contexts--self is the context in which the experience of those contexts occurs. You are not your experiences or the records of those experiences. Self is what we refer to when we say I'm experiencing this or that. It isn't the this or the that, and it isn't the experiencing

and it isn't the I. It's the context or generating principle which makes the experience of those things possible.

It's tempting at this point to say that our language really isn't adequate to talk about these things, because we have a thing-oriented language which divides self and experience into subject and object<sup>1</sup> as if self was doing or containing the experience. And to a certain extent that's true. And as I've already said, concepts can't get at this, and everybody knows words are concepts. And, as Wittgenstein said, whereof we cannot speak, thereof should we be silent. Still, there are hints in language that point to what language can't contain, and one of those hints is the expression "the experience of self." In language, this seems viciously circular. I mean, if self is the source of experiencing, can it experience itself as the source of its own experience?

The problem is, as soon as we have an experience of a context, we turn it into a concept and regard it as just another name for just another thing, an "it." Now this isn't necessarily a trap, providing we remember to remember that a self is not an it--and that the experience of self is not an experience--it's what I call the being of that experience. In other words, self is the source of abstraction, not experience and not concept.

I'm saying that self is the actual source of human experience, including the source of most theories of human experience.

Abstraction, then, would be an "experience" that did not come from experience but to experience. It would illuminate experience and make possible the sorts of experience that do not derive from the redundant circular survival system we call experience. Abstraction, then, makes it possible to have unique experiences without threat to the survival of the self-experience called abstraction. It reveals the ways in which concepts have prefigured experience and, in order to build up probability and redundancy, have obscured or clouded the experience of abstraction, which is essentially unique, non-redundant, and non-repeatable.

Abstraction is that kind of consciousness which results in the experience of brand new theoretical leaps, precisely because that consciousness has no need to agree with the system of previous experiences and concepts. (Paradoxically, this sort of experience--the creative solution to what seemed an insoluble problem--adds survival value by subtracting from it.)

You see, abstraction comes from nothing. Experience comes from abstraction and concepts come from experience. Abstraction is creating from nothing. It is like that bolt out of the blue -- usually accompanied by experiences of surprise, delight, wonder, amazement, simplicity and obviousness -- you know "of course! Why didn't I see that before!" But more than that -- it is the "experience" of that whole new kind of experience. It is an "experience" of pure possibility. That I think is where Einstein came from.

#### IV. ENLIGHTENMENT OR TRANSFORMATION

Such "experiences" have been called enlightenment or transformation. I want to be absolutely accurate now, so I mean to share with you that I'm uncomfortable calling abstractions "enlightenment" on two counts: first - the connotations of the word enlightenment imply a kind of eastern mysticism, and while I have nothing against eastern mysticism, I want you to know that what I'm talking about is not an experience which requires that context to exist in, and second - properly understood, abstraction is not itself an experience -- it is, in my view, a quality or context of self - not a content.

So true abstraction, or true enlightenment is not a content. It is not something that happens to you because things that happen, happen in time and place, and what abstraction "does"

is alter and transform your experience of time and place. Actually, it alters the quality of your experience by revealing or discovering how you experience everything - including time and place. And transformation, in my view, is precisely the revelation or dis-covering of the domain - or possibility - of those "experiences" people call enlightenment experiences - the "experiences" I am calling abstractions. Transformation is the discovery of the possibility of abstraction as the source of experience.

Now I want you to know that I'm fully aware that one of the implications of what I've just said is that this borders on scientific heresy in some circles. Because I've just said that unless there has been a transformation -- (and mind you - transformation is not an event - more of that later on) the possibility of including the self in experience remains closed. You see, I'm calling for including the observer in the act of observation. To me, that's "obvious", and I know that's not always obvious to everyone.

There are still lots of scientists who still think it's a scientific heresy to include the observer in the observed. But including the observer in the observed is now a requirement in contemporary physics and, of course, it is not foreign to those of you here who are clinicians. There are even contemporary logicians who have built whole logics on self-referential axioms<sup>20,21</sup> and premises.

The problem with this injunction of self-inclusion is that people think that including the self means including the systems of experiences and concepts they think the self consists of, so they cry foul -- and warn of theoretical bias and contamination by belief.

I couldn't agree more. The last thing I'm suggesting is more concepts and more belief. In fact, I would say that only by including the self - that is - the experience by abstraction - in the act of observation do you ever have any observations at all; since observation, as I understand it, cannot be separated from the intention to observe freshly, without bias or at least, with known, or as we say, "control for" bias. Isn't it precisely this ability to see freshly what was apparently impossible and what is subsequently "obvious" that we admire in great theorists?

Essentially, what Einstein represents for me is a break with ordinary reality and a philosophy rooted in belief in the sensorium. So that it can be said that Einstein legitimized the generation of logics and philosophies and realities which are not sense amenable. There are logics of sense-amenable realities and there are other logics. You see, I want to move beyond what is called naive realism - the camera epistemology which puts me over here and reality over there, and right off - the war's on - it's me or it, and you know whose side I'm on.

It is not commonly realized that this so called realistic epistemology carries with it the premise that I've got to be right to survive, so the better the picture I get of what's out there, the better off I am. The result is that I decide to shut off my experience of self so that I can maintain the illusion of accuracy, when in fact my "experience" of self as the source of my experience is the only way I can be responsible for my observation of what's out there, without becoming an automatic mechanical recording of what's out there.

That's why I use the word abstraction. In the ordinary dictionary meaning of the word, abstract means removed from the sensorium. This is not without its paradoxes, however, because I would maintain that precisely insofar as you are the effect of the world's impact on your experience which you record as concept, just so far are you removed from accurately observing or abstracting what's actually so in your experience of what's out there.

So most of us, most of the time, are stuck in our concepts. Rarely, on occasion, we move to experience, which also has a logic all its own, almost never used. And even more rarely, we move to abstraction, the source of experiencing which has another kind of logic; therefore, incomprehensible to the logics of experience and concept -- full of paradoxes and apparent contradictions which give rise to the kind of statements that people think you're strange for making.

I am saying that the experience of self is an abstract experience, which self can have as the context of all other experiences that self can have as content, and that when a context considers itself to be its content, what we value most is thrown away. You see what a mess we've made. So perhaps it would be valuable to look at how that mess happened.

I think it happened because there's never been a system of holding it all. There's never been an epistemological system in science which allowed people who knew the experience of abstraction to express what was really going on. And I think it is possible to generate a system which allows or enables the experience of abstract experiences in a very systematic way. It's the system I've been describing. It's the system that allows Bucky Fuller<sup>8</sup> to say -- look, I'm strange.

Without a system of this kind, all we can ever get is controversy and argument over who's right and who's wrong, and that isn't the point. The point is to enable the kind of experience which results in enormous incredible leaps of context -- not just content.

The whole growth movement - or human potential movement argues for the validity of experience as the basis of existence. They argued that we ought to shift the basis of experience away

from our intellect - or what they thought was our intellect - which they located in the head. They said we've got to get out of our heads to survive. What they really meant was out of our concepts. What happened was there ensued a big argument about whether people ought to be intellectual or experiential. What nonsense. They haven't been intellectual yet. The question is -- should people be explanatory - conceptual - symbolic - or should they be genuinely experiential.

You see, at this point the controversy becomes meaningless. Of course people should be genuinely experiential - but all the "hip" people thought that means we're supposed to be in touch with our feelings and we should be honest about where we're at, and we should move freely, and all stay out of our heads.

So most people mistake est for a growth experience and they think est means staying out of your head. Absolutely not. The essence of est is intellect. That is what est is. But I don't define intellect as concept or as experience. I say intellect is the experience of abstraction, which generates experience, and is not the result of it.

You see, you can't get to abstraction from symbols and concepts. You can only reach back to abstraction by reaching the self as the source of experience. Self doesn't explain experience - it enables it. Experience comes from abstractions,

and concept comes from experience, and abstractions come from nothing. They are not results you see - they simply are. They aren't doing anything. They are being - or - in human terms - being aware. They are awareness at the beginning of awareness. Except that the words "beginning" and "awareness" are concepts, so they don't really fit, they only point.

Another way of saying this is that there are really three ways to talk about self. There's the self as concept-- the system of stored experiences, the point of view that results from all its previous experiences and concepts. We usually call that personality in the sense that Alice has a pleasing personality.

Then there's self as experience - the direct experience - right now - of the self by the self. These are usually called peak experiences, and I have no wish to belittle or demean them. They are truly beautiful experiences and are usually remembered as the high points in the graphs we all keep of beautiful experiences. That is what the human potential people generate, and I totally support them in doing that. I've had experiences of that kind myself, and I want to tell you they are really magnificent experiences to have. Incredible, beautiful experiences, really.

But there is a third sort of "experience." Now I've got to warn you again that I'm using the word experience in a way it wasn't really designed for, because the experience of transformation - this third kind of experience of self that I'm talking about - is not really an experience by the self - it is the self - it's not something the self does or has - it's an "experience" of self; not the self or my self or your self - but simply self as self - not the self of time and place, but self as self, in such a way that the "my" self of my experience and the "your" self of your experience are transcended in discovery (or rediscovery) of self as the ultimate context of my self and your self.

You see, transformation is not an event. It doesn't have the properties of things or experiences. It has no position, no location in time, no beginning, no middle, no end. It doesn't look like anything or feel like anything. You could say it's a shift in the basis of experience from self as point of view or from self as direct experience to self as self, or self as simply being.

True transformation is the recovery by the self of the generating principles with which self creates the self. Transformation is self as self - the space in which being

occurs, or to put it another way - it is the being of abstraction or the context which the being of abstraction is.

Am I beginning to sound funny? Good. You see, the "reason" for that is that self as abstraction has another kind of logic, in which it is possible to say things like - if transformation happened it didn't happen because things that happen in time aren't a transformation, they're things that happen in time. Just as the sound of one hand clapping is the sound of one hand clapping and that's the ultimate statement about that, so self giving rise to self is what gives rise to self. That's the complete statement on that.

So self is the ultimate context. Immediately on making self an event, you're not talking about transformation. As soon as you start talking about transformation as event you're not talking about transformation. Transformation is the context of transformation. If something happened, that is not transformation. What did you get out of it? Nothing. If I got anything out of it that's not it anyway. That's a result of it. Where did it happen? Nowhere. When did it happen? Never. That's transformation.

#### V. TRANSFORMATION OF SELF

Now, people who are transformed can hear that. That can't be heard with a content system. If you listen as you usually listen you won't hear what I've said. So what actually happens is nothing - or everything. So if it occurs, it doesn't occur. And if it occurs, then it always was.

Does that offend your system of understanding. It does mine. It offends the system of understanding which is designed to handle things you can perceive, which is a system designed to handle parts, not wholes. The systems of logic designed to handle parts can't handle wholes.

Now, as general systems people I know you think you know that, and you do -- as a system of understanding.

Then what I'm saying is not about systems of understanding or experiencing events. What I'm talking about is the "experience" of your ability to be transformed in the quality of your life, because the definitions of transformation is the experience of your ability to be transformed. If you know you have the ability to transform the quality of your life, you are transformed.

Transformation, then, is the context in which transformation can occur. The experience of that transformation is one of wholeness and completeness, of self as totally fulfilled and completely satisfied to be. Transformation is not a peak experience. Transformation is not the experience of self. Transformation is the self itself. If you listen carefully to what I just said, not with your understanding, but with your self, you will hear that what I just said is that transformation is completion. Transformation is being complete. What is the

chair as chair? It's complete. What is the room as room? It's complete. What is the self as self? It's complete. It is the complete self, simply being self.

The dictionary has a beautifully abstract definition of complete. It's beautifully contextual. It says "complete implies the inclusion of all that is needed for the integrity, perfection or fulfillment" of something.

That captures my meaning exactly. When self is self, that is the experience of being complete. That is the experience of integrity, or being true to yourself.

The point is that self is the context of all contexts, so transformation is a miracle - a miracle being defined as a transcending of the laws of the medium in which it occurs. Transformation transcends the laws of time and place, and allows or creates being.

So it transforms your history. It transforms you from being a player in your drama to you as the space in which the drama occurs. It is you as that which contains the universe. Instead of being in the universe, the universe is your creation. There's no longer any content to it. It simply is, and it is, completely.

Ordinary life, then, happens in circle 3, and peak experiences happen in circle 2, and transformation happens at the level of abstraction, or circle 1. True transformation is the space in which to experience transformation. You are the space in which transformation occurs. You are the abstraction in which the "experience" transformation is.

#### VI. est AND TRANSFORMATION

So what est is about is transformation. est is about the self being self. And one of the things you uncover or discover or recover when you discover that you are your self is that absolutely everybody is themselves, and that you can't get transformed because in order to get transformed you'd have to be not transformed and if you're not transformed you can never be transformed because transformation doesn't have a beginning, middle or end.

That's what it means when I say that transformation is completion. Completion is absolutely essential to transformation. When one is transformed one is complete.

Now I want you to know that I know that what I just said is terribly uncomfortable if you're trying to hold it in a system of understanding. It sounds like abstract metaphysics, or something you've got to strain to understand. That is because it doesn't fit into the system of understanding we usually use to understand things that are difficult to understand. It can not be understood, if by understanding you mean concepts or experiences.

But I guarantee you - if you get what I'm saying with who you are - you will recognize what I'm saying is absolutely obvious, and not understandable in the normal sense of the word understanding.

You see, I'm saying you are complete and you don't understand it. To which I reply so what. You see, we think if we understand it then we'll be complete, and what I'm saying is you are complete and you don't understand it, but that's OK, you see, because you are complete, so you don't have to understand it to be complete.

You see, there is no way to become complete. Completion is not something which begins, because if it was incomplete before it was complete, it wouldn't have been complete, it would have begun to be complete, and that is not completion, that's just becoming complete.

And becoming never ends. There's always more. More to do. More to have. More to become.

When the context of your life shifts from becoming satisfied to being satisfied, an essential shift has occurred. You no longer seek satisfaction - you are satisfied. You no longer seek completion - you are complete. You shift from chasing satisfaction and completeness to expressing or manifesting satisfaction and completeness.

Life shifts from a process of becoming complete to a process of being complete. The process of life doesn't stop, or end, or finish. Life goes on. And, from the space of completion, instead of life seeking itself, life begins to give of itself. It shares itself. It causes life. It brings satisfaction to life. It creates life and shares the "experience" of life.

In that sense, transformation reveals itself as a continuous beginning. Each experience is a fresh beginning and a complete ending, because it expresses satisfaction.

Now I know this sounds difficult and "abstract," but actually there's nothing simpler than recognizing someone who comes from satisfaction and completion as compared with someone who is anxiously seeking it. We can all spot somebody who is fully alive, who experiences self as a generating rather than a containing context. There is a manifest healthiness about such people - a vivacity - an experience of love and full self-expression. We usually say such people are in radiant health, to describe that quality they have of sharing it or making it

real so others can participate in it with them. They don't seem to think it's theirs - they seem to know it's ours. We have the experience that they're home - that they're there - that they fully are.

I call that the experience of aliveness, and I think you can recognize what I'm talking about as having one further quality that I want to talk about before I complete this essay and that is, such people seem to have a transformed experience of relationship.

Now I can show you why that must be so from what I've said above. It follows like night follows day that people who experience themselves as complete don't deal with other people as opportunities to have their own needs filled. In short, they don't regard other people as objects of gratification, but as subjects with whom to share the experience of completeness and satisfaction.

This is another one of those qualities that our system of understanding regards as necessarily rare and unusual, because almost nobody has ever carefully studied how people who are complete and satisfied relate. Our ordinary way of understanding holds that completely satisfied people will sit around narcissistically wallowing in their satisfaction like pigs in warm mud; when in fact nothing could be further from the truth.

It is a perfectly observable fact that people who experience themselves as complete are the very same people who create whole new ways of living - and "seeing" - precisely because they don't need to, so they aren't risking anything by creating something new. The Buddhists say such people are not "attached" to their creations, and we say, "Hell, he can afford to create - I've got to earn a living."

Do you see how backwards we've got it? Self as context allows the self to be complete, whole, alive. With self as context, life is a process of the expression of the experience of completion rather than a seeking to become complete. Similarly, experiences of relation premised on self as content have got to result in competition for scarce peak experiences, while self as context results in experiences of relation which are satisfying--self-revealing rather than self-seeking. In my language, I say transformed people "create space" for others to be in relationship with them, because they don't experience themselves being their point of view, but as the context in which they have a point of view. Relationships of this sort survive precisely because they don't have to. Relationships of this sort create relationships of this sort--they don't stand there waiting for one to come along. Or, in clinical terms, relationships of this sort are made by people who aren't trying to get better, they are people being well.

And, of course, as we all know, they're rare. But perhaps not so rare as we ordinarily think, and certainly, in my view, not necessarily rare or unusual.

#### VII. est AND GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Now I think its time I got around to talking about what I was invited here to talk about, and thankfully, when it comes to the matter of general systems theory and cybernetics and family therapy and things of that sort, I'm a complete amateur. I don't say that to be humble - its just the god-awful truth.

You know,among my friends,I have a reputation for never reading beyond the first ten pages of the books I read. Now that isn't exactly accurate,but its close. I have to be honest and tell you that I have not read widely in your fields. Some of you have been kind enough to send me copies of your work and I want to thank you for them,and tell you that I appreciate the opportunity to share your experience of your work and your creativity. And I have to tell you that when I read over the bibliography for this essay it looked very impressive, but now that you know I've only shopped around in them to familiarize myself somewhat with your field,I know you won't be tempted to be impressed by them.

As I see it, general systems theory is really an epistemological reorientation - an attempt to deal with the properties of whole systems not predictable from the properties of

parts that comprise the system; and that, at least to some extent, the general systems point of view developed to handle two different but related problems: the problem of over specialization, with each specialty pouring out millions of data points every year, and the related problem of dealing with the properties of organisms as whole organisms, not as a sum of organs and other biological parts. And as I understand it, Bertalanffy<sup>3,4,5</sup> Lazlo<sup>14,15</sup> Buckley<sup>6</sup> Menninger<sup>16</sup> Gray<sup>9,10</sup> and others, all shared this orientation to seeing whole as wholes, not as sums, but as wholes, each with its own integrity.

And clearly, from what I've already said, you must know that I can have nothing but admiration and respect for an orientation that intends to respect the integrity of things as they are, not as they're thought to be. I really want to emphasize that - I have a great deal of admiration for your work because it seems to me that you are not what I've called naive realists, confining yourselves to sense-amenable realities, but are willing to be responsible for grappling with what has got to be the baffling complexity of things taken apart, when you know there is a simple order to be found if you look at things in their genuine interrelatedness. And this leads some of you to look to the community and family sources for insight into the people who seek your assistance, or into the structure of the message systems which have more noise in them than you think is healthy for them. I admire that willingness and I thank you

for including me in your conference to discuss these matters, which I think are important and valuable.

So, coming from that spirit of admiration and respect for your work, I want to say that I don't regard what I'm about to say as a comment or evaluation of your work because as an amateur admirer, I'm not qualified to do that.

But there is something I would like to say about the perspective that general systems theory brings to the many disciplines it touches on, and that is an issue which came up for us at a recent research conference which was convened by the est Foundation.

The purpose of the conference was to examine paradigms for research into enlightenment or transformation. I'd like to share with you the excitement I experienced at that conference at the possibility of generating a whole new paradigm for doing research into transformation. I was really struck by that possibility because I think it truly could produce some value in the world. Just the recognition by the scientific community that some contemporary ( and some not so contemporary ) research strategies may not be the best way to approach research into transformation was something I found very exciting. Just the prospect of saying - well - maybe there are other ways - maybe this is not the only way - struck me

# VIII. CONCLUSION

Now just to document that I'm not entirely out on a limb raising this question of transformation among a group of general systems theorists, I'd like to close by citing a short paragraph written by one of the people in this room who was kind and generous enough to extend the invitation to me to come here and be with you and have the opportunity to participate with you.

I hope it's not too flattering to single you out, Dr. Gray, and I don't do it in the spirit of flattery. I want to read this quote because I think it lies exactly at the interface of the epistemology that enables general systems theory and the epistemology that derives from est. I think it focuses that issue really superbly and it makes it makes it possible to see our commonalities and our differences in a very clear light.

The paragraph reads:

"(Thus) anamorphosis, or the spontaneous transition toward higher order, is now recognized as a principle applicable to all living organisms and to certain other open systems not in the biological area. General systems theory means the living organism as an open system with autonomous activity and anamorphosis. This type of model makes more clear the intrinsic potential of living systems for growth and development and for creativity. The origin of anamorphosis remains one of the major problems facing general systems theory."

And, I would add, facing all of us.

Thank you.

as very exciting. I really can't imagine anything more exciting than that.

And I'll tell you why. It seems to me that what befuddles a lot of contemporary research,---for example, in particle physics - is that the people doing particle physics research with a brand new transformed epistemology of particles are simply unable to come from a brand new transformed epistemology of the self they now require to be included in their equations. I think that's very far-reaching.

So I think the potential for transformed research is very far-reaching - and certainly not limited to the study of transformation. I think it has fundamental implications for sciences across the spectrum of contemporary research.

In other words, some research is now coming around to the view that the researcher who creates his research is not somebody who's making stuff up - you know - imagining things and calling it data - but is actually somebody whose experience of self is transformed - so he is really responsible for what he creates. That possibility is something I see as enormously valuable for the research community, and for the rest of us.

You see, in my view, until you experience yourself as the creator of what you know, you can only know symbolically. To know it directly, you have to create it.

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Thank you.

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